CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

News Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Public Safety Warning

Extreme High Surf and Dangerous Conditions Expected along the California Coast

An intense storm system currently located approximately 700 miles northwest of California has generated large oceanic swells that are forecasted to reach the coastal waters of California beginning on Monday, December 3 and continue through the week. The surf, expected to be the largest swell so far this year, could very well be bigger than anything seen last winter according to some forecasters.

West facing beaches along the California coast can expect high surf that is very powerful due to the direct angle and period of this swell. The forecasted surf for Central and Northern California is expected to increase in size beginning on Monday, December 3 and peak on Tuesday with surf heights of 15 – 25 feet and larger at some west facing beaches and reefs. Large, dangerous surf will continue throughout the week.

West facing beaches in Southern California will see surf heights increasing on Tuesday, December 4 with the swell peaking on Wednesday. While the surf may not reach the forecasted size of Central and Northern California, surf of 7 – 12 feet may been seen on Wednesday at those southern beaches that receive westerly swells.

The combination of the high surf throughout California's coastal waters and tides of up to 6.0 feet in the morning will likely cause some local coastal flooding of low lying areas during the periods of high tides this week. In anticipation of this danger, some state parks and beaches may be closed to the public.

The public is being warned that surf heights will continue to remain high in many areas throughout the week and into the weekend with strong, dangerous currents.

This swell is forecasted to be large and powerful with wave periods between 17– 19 seconds. "This can cause lulls between the largest sets of waves and park visitors may be fooled into thinking that the waterline is safer than it is due to these lulls," said Alex Peabody, Aquatic Safety Specialist with the State Parks Public Safety Division.

"There are a number of factors coming together that may make this high surf period especially dangerous for the public," says Peabody:

1.) High tides in the mornings will create dangerous coastal conditions in areas that are open to the westerly swells. Inversely, low tides in the afternoon combined with the surf size and direction will increase the danger from rip currents along the beaches and may cause breaking waves at some harbor entrances.

2.) The direct angle from the storm will impact the entire coast of California and produce very powerful waves and currents.

3.) This swell's long periods will produce some deceiving lulls at times; while every now and then sets could come in that are far greater in size, fooling the unknowing or inexperienced visitor to the beach into thinking the ocean is safe and venturing onto exposed beach and rock areas.

Peabody cautions visitors to avoid exposed beach and rock areas close to the surf line. These areas can seem safe from most breaking waves, but the pattern of breaking waves produces a periodic sequence of large, very strong surges that can wash over rocks and beaches great distances and take visitors by surprise. Watch from a distance, not up close!

"In the interest of public safety, swimming, wading and water sports should be avoided at the height of this swell. Popular surfing areas in our state parks may see extreme conditions to the point where even experts will be at risk entering the water. Please check with your local state park office, or NOAA Weather Service for the updated information and local conditions," said Peabody.

"Be preventative, and be safe out there," he said.

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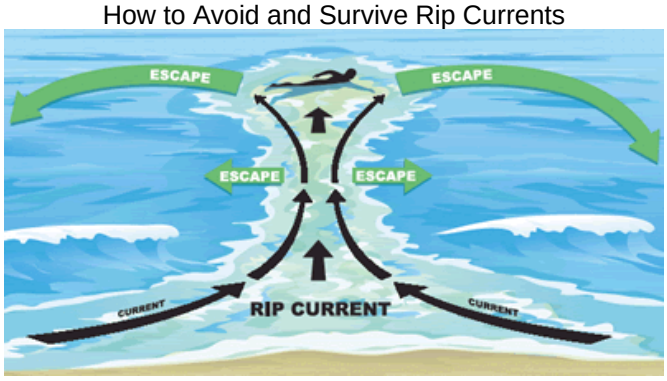
The following information is provided courtesy of the United States Lifesaving Association, in partnership with NOAA's National Weather Service:

How to Avoid and Survive Rip Currents



Learn how to swim!

- Never swim alone.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out!

- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard protected beach.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards and other public safety personnel.
- If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1 . Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**

For more information on rip currents go to: www.usla.org/ripcurrents